YOUR COMMUNITY HEALTH PLATFORM

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Understanding Cancer

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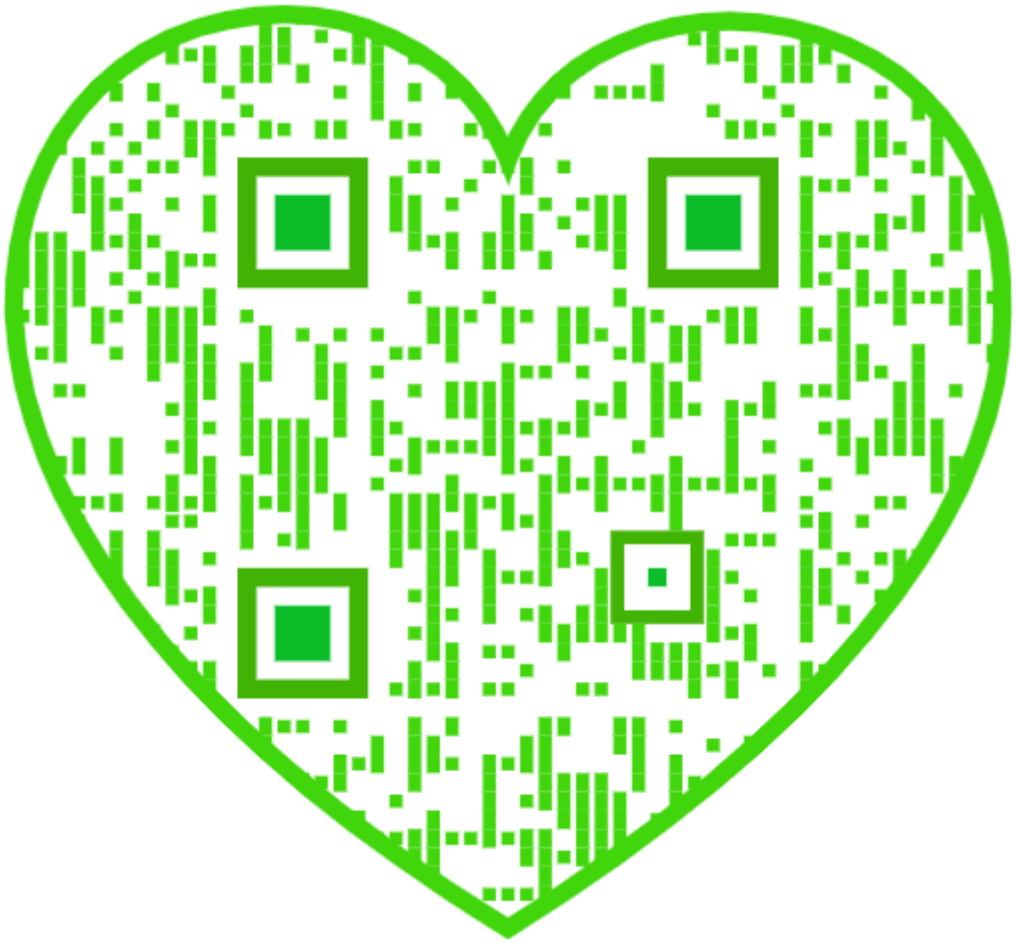

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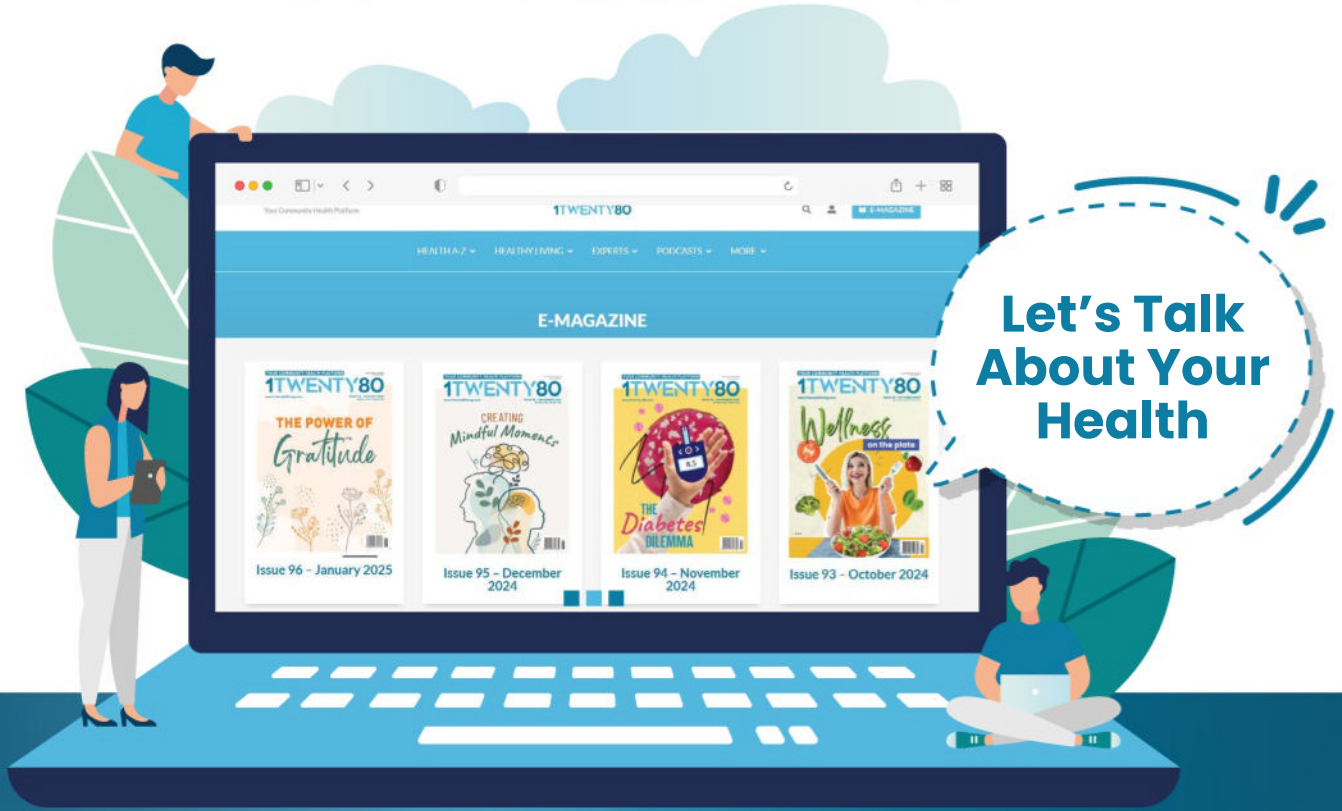

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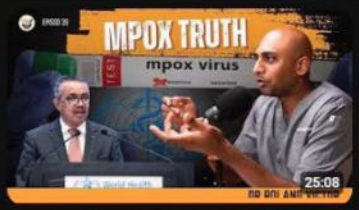

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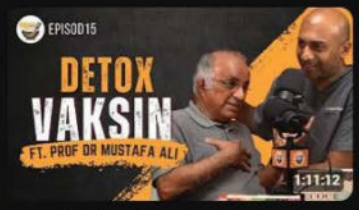

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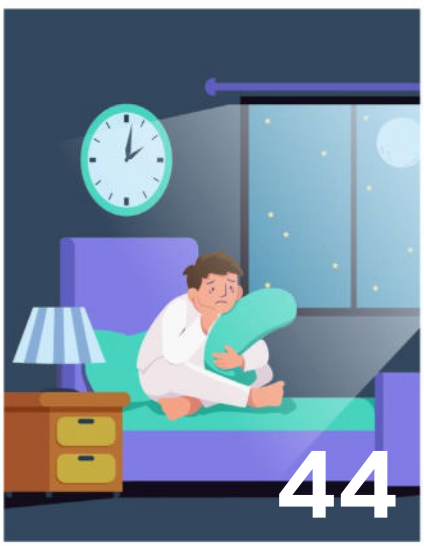

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Let's start this journey together—because your health is worth it."

Cancer is often seen as something that just happens—like winning (or losing) the genetic lottery. But here's a fact that might surprise you: 90-95% of cancer cases are linked to lifestyle and environmental factors. That means our everyday choices—what we eat, how much we move, how well we sleep—play a huge role in shaping our health.

Let's be real, though: making healthier choices isn't always easy. Life gets busy, stress takes over, and sometimes a slice of cake feels like the answer to all your problems (no judgment—we've all been there). But the good news is that small, consistent changes can make a big difference. Eating more fruits and vegetables, staying active, cutting back on smoking or alcohol—these steps don't just lower cancer risk; they also improve your overall quality of life.

This doesn't mean we can prevent every case of cancer. There are factors we can't control, like genetics or certain environmental exposures. But the power we do have lies in how we care for ourselves daily. Think of it as an investment in your future—a way to tip the odds in your favor.

In this issue, we explore the relationship between cancer and lifestyle, offering practical, science-backed advice to help you take charge of your health. Remember, it's not about perfection. It's about progress and making choices that help you feel your best today and in the years to come.

Turn the pages of 1Twenty80's February issue for expert advice, inspiring stories, and actionable steps to feel your best.

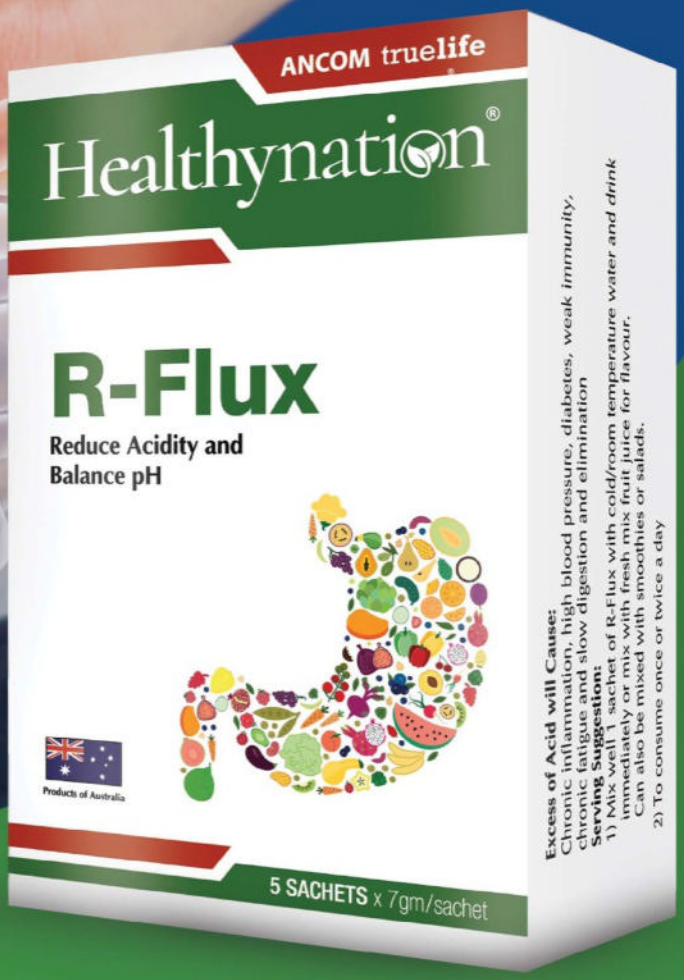
Let's start this journey together—because your health is worth it. Keep reading and discover how small changes can lead to big rewards!

Edeline

Healthy Nation®

Having Problem As Below?

- Acid Reflux
- Bloatedness
- Digestive Issues
- Severe Gastric Problem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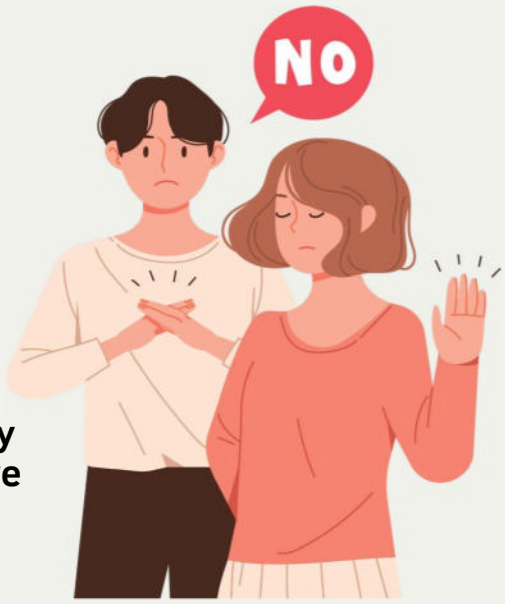
THE ART OF SAYING NO



Feeling stretched thin and overwhelmed by commitments just because you find it hard to say 'no'?. Here's how setting boundaries can improve your wellness.

By Dheevya Gunaseelan

What Are Boundaries?

Boundaries are like invisible lines we draw to protect our time, energy, and mental well-being. Defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as 'the limit of what someone considers to be acceptable behavior', boundaries help us manage our relationships and commitments.

Saying 'no' is an essential part of setting boundaries. It ensures you don't stretch yourself too thin or allow others to take advantage of your time and goodwill. While it might feel uncomfortable initially, especially if you're naturally inclined to help, learning to say 'no' is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself.

How Boundaries Boost Wellness

1. REDUCES EMOTIONAL BURNOUT

Constantly saying 'yes' can leave you feeling overcommitted and emotionally exhausted. By setting boundaries, you give yourself the space to recharge and focus on what truly matters to you. This prevents burnout and keeps you emotionally balanced.

2. STRENGTHENS HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Clear boundaries create mutual respect in relationships, helping you avoid unhealthy dynamics like codependency. When everyone knows where they stand, it paves the way for connections built on understanding and support—not obligation.

3. ENCOURAGES SELF-CARE

Boundaries are a way to prioritise yourself without guilt. They act as a shield against toxic situations and give you the freedom to dedicate time to self-care practices that nourish your mind and body.

Tips for Setting Boundaries

- **KNOW YOUR LIMITS:** Reflect on what feels right for you—whether it's the amount of time you dedicate to work, social activities, or personal commitments.

- **BE HONEST BUT KIND:** Saying 'no' doesn't mean you have to be harsh. A simple, "I'd love to help, but I can't take this on right now," goes a long way.

- **PRACTICE CONSISTENCY** Boundaries only work when they're upheld. Stay firm, even if others push back.

Boundaries may feel awkward at first, but over time, they'll become second nature. They're not just about protecting yourself; they're about ensuring you show up as your best self for the people and activities you truly value. Remember, saying 'no' isn't selfish—it's an act of self-love.

Sources: Papyrus, See Beyond

Cancer as a *Lifestyle Disease*

The choices you make today can shape your health tomorrow

By Siti Salihah

When you think of cancer, you might imagine a genetic lottery—something you're born with and can't control. But here's a surprising fact: inherited mutations only account for about 5–10% of cancer cases worldwide. The remaining 90–95%? That's heavily influenced by your lifestyle and environment.

What actually causes cancer?

Cancer arises from a combination of genetic, environmental, and personal factors. These elements interact in ways that increase the risk, each contributing to the development of the disease.

At the heart of it, cancer develops when the natural balance in our bodies goes awry. Normally, our cells grow, divide, and die in a controlled way, but when this process is disrupted, cells start multiplying uncontrollably. This unchecked growth leads to tumours, which can invade nearby tissues and spread to other parts of the body.

As cancer cells multiply, they release harmful toxins into the bloodstream, affecting multiple systems in the body. This is why people with cancer often feel fatigued, lose weight, and experience symptoms like nausea and organ damage. It's a condition that doesn't just stay in one place—demonstrating the importance of early detection.

Lifestyle diseases

Also referred to as chronic diseases, lifestyle diseases are driven by unhealthy lifestyle choices. These conditions often stem from poor dietary habits and the relentless pace of high-pressure urban living, where slowing down feels impossible. The result? Chronic stress, anxiety, and the overproduction of free radicals in the body, all of which contribute to the development of these conditions.

The most common lifestyle diseases include:

#1

Cardiovascular diseases

#2

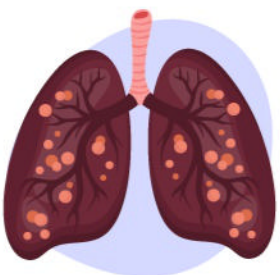
Diabetes

#3

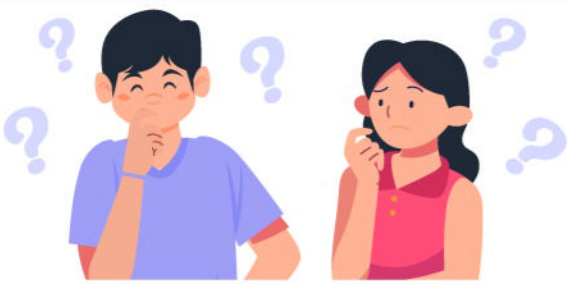
Chronic lung diseases

#4

Cancer



How cancer fits into the picture



Cancer, like other lifestyle diseases, is influenced by both uncontrollable and controllable factors. While genetics and environmental exposures are part of the picture, lifestyle choices such as diet, smoking, exercise, and alcohol consumption play a significant role in both increasing and reducing cancer risk. Adopting healthier habits can not only prevent cancer but can also improve quality of life during and after diagnosis of cancer. In fact, making changes to modifiable lifestyle factors has been proven to prevent an estimated 30–40% of cancers.

Lifestyle factors that influence cancer risk

#1 Poor sleep habits

Ever heard of the circadian rhythm, such as the body clock? Disruptions to this natural rhythm can increase the chances of developing multiple types of cancer. The decreased secretion of melatonin—the hormone that helps you sleep when it's dark—occurs when exposed to light during sleepless nights and also encourages cancer growth.

#2 Diet

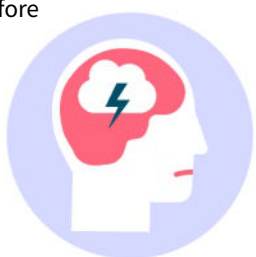
A diet high in processed foods, red meat, and sugar raises the risk of developing cancer by leading to inflammation, insulin resistance, and oxidative stress that promote cancer growth. This is why a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins has been shown to reduce cancer risk by providing essential nutrients, antioxidants, and anti-inflammatory compounds that boost the immune system and help prevent cancer.

#3 Lack of exercise

Cancer and obesity have been extensively studied, and research consistently shows that excess body fat increases the risk of several cancers. The aftermath of neglecting a balanced diet and regular exercise, obesity causes chronic inflammation in the body, raising levels of certain chemicals that promote cell growth and prevent cell death—key contributors to cancer development.

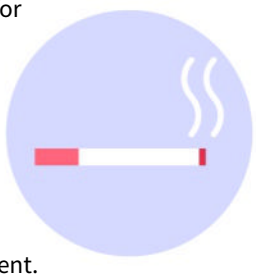
#4 Chronic stress

Unlike short bursts of stress such as before a nerve-wracking speech or waiting for your final exams results, long-term stress causes your body to release stress hormones that weaken your immune system, making you more susceptible to cancer. These hormones prevent the body from eliminating unhealthy or dead cells, allowing them to spread.



#5 Smoking

The most easily avoidable risk factor for cancer, smoking has been linked to at least 16 different types of cancer. Tobacco contains carcinogens which are particularly tied to lung cancer. Smoking can alter cell signaling pathways, trigger inflammation, and activate inflammatory markers, all of which contribute to cancer development.



#6 Alcohol

The connection between alcohol and cancer was first identified in 1910, and since then, research has consistently shown that regular alcohol consumption increases the risk of developing various types of cancer. Simply put: the more you drink, the higher your risk. There's no safe amount of alcohol when it comes to cancer prevention, so even moderate drinking carries some level of risk.

#7 Environmental exposures

Remember the radiation-infested areas abandoned after wartime, where everyone succumbed to cancer or other deadly diseases? Today, air pollution is a modern-day threat, with tiny particles that settle in the lungs, damage DNA, and trigger inflammation and mutations that can lead to cancer. In workplaces, exposure to carcinogens like asbestos and welding fumes also increases the risk.

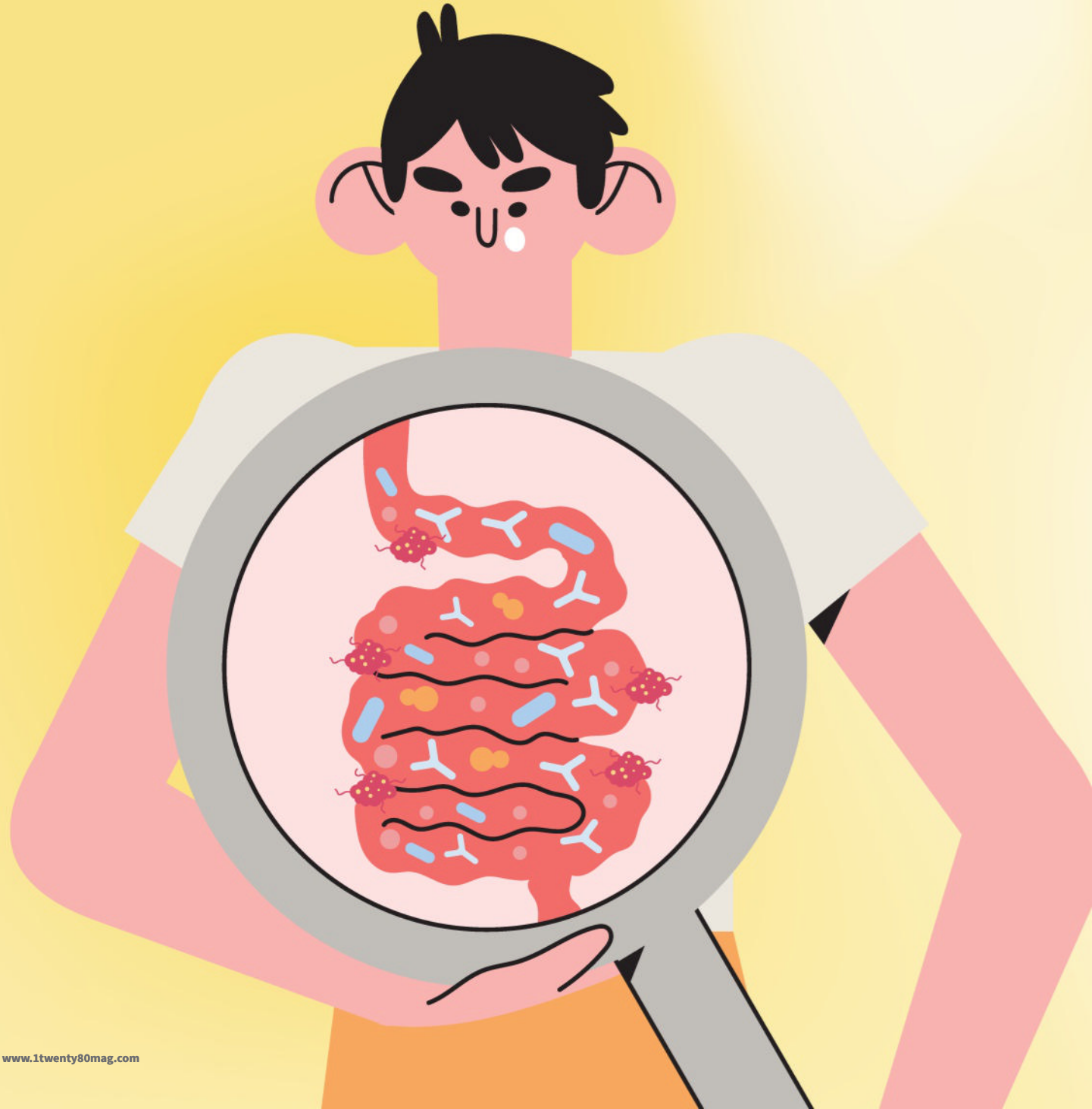
At the end of the day, there's only so much we can control—but making thoughtful lifestyle choices can truly make a difference. Prioritise good sleep, balanced meals, regular exercise, and stress management. Quit smoking, limit alcohol, and avoid harmful exposures where you can. While not every risk is avoidable, these steps are your best shot at tipping the scales in your favour. It's not about being perfect, but about giving yourself the best chance to live well and stay healthy. ■

Source: Sources: Science Direct , BioMed Research International , Oxford , English Dictionary, Mayo Clinic Proceedings, Pharmaceutical Research, World Cancer Research Fund International, Molecular Oncology

Gut Microbiome & Cancer

Could gut health be the next frontier in cancer treatment?

By Siti Salihah



The gut microbiome—home to trillions of bacteria—plays a far greater role in our health than many realise. Research is uncovering how these microbes influence not just digestion and immunity, but also cancer development and treatment. While studies suggest that gut bacteria could be key to cancer prevention, we're still just scratching the surface.

To delve deeper, we spoke with Dr. Sheikh Anwar Bin Abdullah, Consultant Gastroenterologist and Hepatologist at Sunway Medical Center. With expertise in managing gastrointestinal and liver disorders, as well as performing advanced procedures like endoscopic ultrasound and liver biopsies, he offers valuable insights into how gut health impacts disease progression.

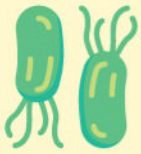
1Twenty80:

What is the current understanding of how the gut microbiome interacts with the immune system to influence cancer development?

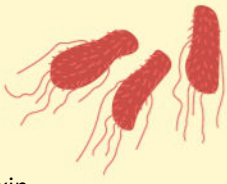
DR. SHEIKH: The gut microbiome comprises microorganisms like bacteria, viruses, and protozoa, most of which reside in the colon. These microbes, weighing approximately two kilograms in total, play vital roles in digestion, immune system modulation, and nutrient provision to the human host.

When it comes to the interaction between the microbiome and the immune system in relation to cancer, several mechanisms have been identified:

DIRECT INTERACTION:
Certain bacteria can directly influence cancer risk through their interactions with host cells:



- Helicobacter pylori (*H. pylori*) can trigger chronic inflammation in the stomach, progressing through stages like gastritis and ulcers, which may eventually lead to gastric cancer due to cellular changes.



- Similarly, some strains of Escherichia coli (*E. coli*) produce a toxin called colibactin, which directly damages DNA in host cells. This DNA damage is a critical mechanism that can lead to cancer development.

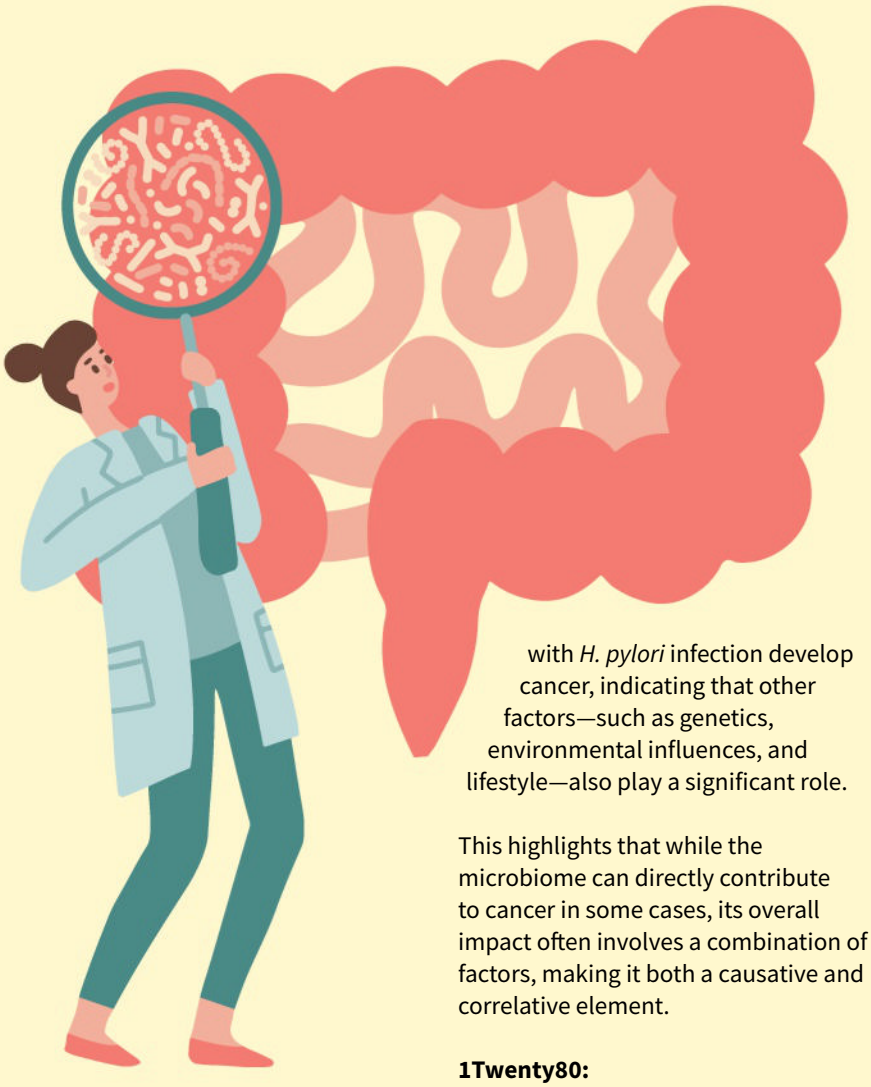
METABOLITE-MEDIATED EFFECTS:
Some gut bacteria produce harmful substances like toxins or secondary bile acids, which can interact with host cells and promote cancer development. Conversely, beneficial metabolites like short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs) can protect against cancer by supporting a healthy immune response.

CHRONIC INFLAMMATION:
Persistent inflammation caused by microbial imbalance (dysbiosis) or infections (such as hepatitis B or C) can damage cells and increase cancer risk.

These microbes, weighing approximately two kilograms in total, play vital roles in digestion, immune system modulation, and nutrient provision to the human host."

BARRIER DISRUPTION:
Dysbiosis can compromise the intestinal barrier, allowing harmful bacteria or carcinogenic substances to interact with host cells, fostering tumor growth.

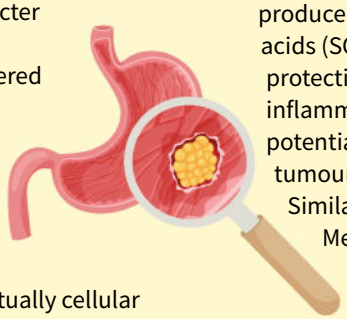
These mechanisms demonstrate how the microbiome's balance and interaction with the immune system can either contribute to or protect against cancer.



1Twenty80:

Can the gut microbiome's role in cancer be more accurately described as causative, correlative, or both?

DR. SHEIKH: The role of the gut microbiome in cancer can be described as both causative and correlative, depending on the context. For example, Helicobacter pylori (*H. pylori*) infection is considered causative in the development of stomach cancer, as it can lead to chronic inflammation, gastritis, and eventually cellular changes. However, not all individuals with *H. pylori* infection develop cancer, indicating that other factors—such as genetics, environmental influences, and lifestyle—also play a significant role.



This highlights that while the microbiome can directly contribute to cancer in some cases, its overall impact often involves a combination of factors, making it both a causative and correlative element.

1Twenty80:

In terms of cancer, how significant is the role of diet and lifestyle in shaping the gut microbiome?

DR. SHEIKH: Diet plays a significant role in shaping the gut microbiome and, in turn, its influence on cancer risk. A diet high in fibre is particularly beneficial because it provides nutrition for gut microbes to produce short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs). SCFAs are protective, reducing inflammation and potentially preventing tumour development. Similarly, the Mediterranean diet, rich in antioxidants, and plant-based diets contribute to a more balanced and stable microbiome.

On the other hand, diets high in ultra-processed foods, red meat, and alcohol can disrupt the microbiome, leading to dysbiosis—a condition where harmful bacteria outnumber beneficial ones. This imbalance can contribute to inflammation and other factors that increase cancer risk.

Lifestyle factors also matter. Regular exercise supports a healthy microbiome, possibly by reducing stress levels, which helps maintain emotional stability. Stress can disrupt the gut-brain axis and negatively impact the microbiome, often leading to poor dietary choices or conditions like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), where microbial imbalances may exacerbate symptoms.

1Twenty80:

How reliable is the current research on the link between the gut microbiome and cancer, given that many studies are still in early stages or use animal models?

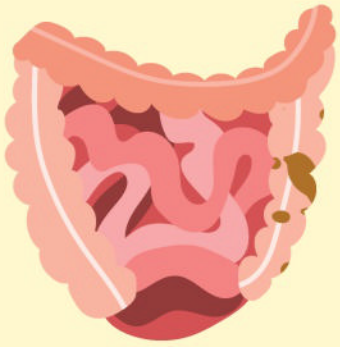
DR. SHEIKH: The majority of current research on the gut microbiome and its link to cancer is still in the early stages. Many studies rely on animal models or preliminary findings, so while the data is promising, more robust and conclusive research is needed to fully understand this connection.

> **Certain types of cancer, such as colon cancer, appear to be more influenced by gut microbiome imbalances, especially in individuals with specific genetic predispositions."**

1Twenty80:

Are there specific types of cancer that are more influenced by gut microbiome imbalances, or is the link more general?

DR. SHEIKH: Certain types of cancer, such as colon cancer, appear to be more influenced by gut microbiome imbalances, especially in individuals with specific genetic predispositions. For example, people with Familial Adenomatous Polyposis (FAP), which is linked to the APC gene mutation, have a high risk of developing colon cancer. Studies suggest that in these cases, an imbalance in the gut microbiome can exacerbate the situation. Harmful bacteria may produce toxins and mediators that stimulate tumour growth, further increasing the likelihood of cancer in individuals who carry this genetic mutation.



1Twenty80:

Are there any ongoing clinical trials exploring microbiome-targeted therapies or interventions specifically in terms of cancer, and what have been the results so far?

DR. SHEIKH: Currently, microbiome-targeted therapies for cancer are still in the early stages, and there are no specific treatments for cancer yet. However, microbiome-based interventions have been explored for other conditions, such as liver cirrhosis, cognitive impairment, Alzheimer's, dementia, autism, and obesity. One of the main approaches being tested is fecal microbiota transplantation (FMT), where feces from healthy individuals are transplanted into patients' guts. This can be done through colonoscopy, or sometimes by encapsulating the good bacteria for oral ingestion.

While FMT shows promise, most of these studies are still in Phase 1, meaning they are at an early stage of testing. Some trials have faced setbacks due to side effects, and the long-term safety of the procedure is still unknown. Additionally, there are concerns about the potential transmission of diseases during the procedure.

One condition where FMT has shown notable success is in treating Clostridium difficile (*C. difficile*) infection, particularly in patients who develop the infection due to the overuse of antibiotics. Antibiotics can disrupt the microbiome, allowing *C. difficile* to overgrow and dominate the colon, becoming a prominent pathogen. By transplanting fecal material from healthy individuals, FMT helps restore the balance of the microbiome, making it more effective than antibiotics in such cases.

For cancer, however, research into microbiome-targeted therapies is still in its infancy, and no conclusive treatments have emerged yet.

1Twenty80:

Since you mentioned that FMT has recently been turned into capsules, what are your thoughts on supplements and probiotics in comparison to that?

DR. SHEIKH: Probiotics, found in fermented foods like yogurt, kimchi, and tempeh, contain beneficial bacteria that support the microbiome. While they can offer short-term benefits, such as helping maintain a healthy microbiome and preventing side effects like antibiotic-associated diarrhea, they are not a long-term solution for cancer prevention. Cancer is influenced by many factors, including genetics, environment, and diet. For example, a Western diet high in processed foods may disrupt the microbiome, which could contribute to conditions like early-onset colon cancer.

However, while probiotics can help restore beneficial bacteria, there isn't enough research to confirm they can protect against cancer. Their primary benefit is in helping to maintain a healthy microbiome, but they are not a guaranteed solution for cancer prevention.

1Twenty80:

Many people are now focused on "gut health" and may make drastic dietary changes. What advice or guidelines would you give to help them make more informed and safe choices?

DR. SHEIKH: The most important thing is to maintain a balanced, healthy diet that includes carbohydrates, fibre, protein, and fats. This is essential for nourishing your microbiome. While adding probiotics to your diet can be helpful, it's not necessary to take them every day. Many foods already contain prebiotics and beneficial bacteria that support gut health.

Focus on eating a variety of whole foods, including fibre-rich foods, and try to limit or avoid ultra-processed foods. While making these changes might be challenging, they're the best way to support your gut health in the long term.

1Twenty80:

You mentioned earlier how antibiotic use can disrupt the balance of gut microbes. How does this imbalance potentially impact cancer risk?

DR. SHEIKH: Antibiotics can disrupt the gut microbiome, leading to dysbiosis, which can increase the production of toxins. While there's no clear evidence that this directly accelerates cancer progression, it can potentially interfere with cancer treatments like chemotherapy and immunotherapy. Antibiotics may reduce the effectiveness of these therapies because they can alter the microbiome, impacting beneficial bacteria that help reduce inflammation.

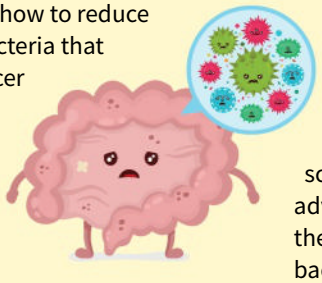
> **"The most important thing is to maintain a balanced, healthy diet that includes carbohydrates, fibre, protein, and fats. This is essential for nourishing your microbiome."**

There is ongoing research into fecal microbiota transplantation (FMT) as a way to restore gut health during cancer treatment. However, it's still in the early stages. One concern is that chemotherapy patients often have a weakened immune system, and introducing live bacteria through FMT could increase the risk of bacteremia, which is a serious infection. While the potential benefits are being studied, the risks need to be carefully considered before FMT becomes a common part of cancer care.

1Twenty80:

Does chemotherapy directly alter the gut microbiome?

DR. SHEIKH: Yes, chemotherapy does alter the gut microbiome. It can disrupt the balance of bacteria in the gut, and this is important because some bacteria can actually promote cancer growth, while others can help chemotherapy or immunotherapy work better. For instance, some beneficial bacteria can reduce inflammation or strengthen the immune system, which helps the treatment fight cancer more effectively. The problem is finding the right balance—how to reduce the harmful bacteria that may make cancer worse, while preserving the good bacteria that support treatment. This is an area that researchers are still studying to understand more clearly.



1Twenty80:

What is your opinion on integrating gut microbiome screening as part of regular cancer prevention and detection protocols?

DR. SHEIKH: Integrating gut microbiome screening into cancer prevention could be beneficial since it's non-invasive. The idea is that by analyzing the microbiome, we might be able to predict which individuals are at higher risk of developing cancer based on their specific gut bacteria. However, we're still in the early stages. The microbiome varies greatly between individuals and is influenced by factors like diet, stress, and obesity, which makes it challenging to create a standardized screening approach. That said, with advancements in artificial intelligence, there's potential to isolate specific bacteria linked to cancer risk in the future. Once we gather more data and establish these links, microbiome screening could help identify individuals at higher risk, allowing them to make dietary changes or other adjustments to reduce their risk. But right now, more research is needed before it can become a routine part of cancer prevention.

1Twenty80:

With growing interest in gut health, how can healthcare professionals better educate people about its genuine role in cancer prevention, while discouraging pseudoscience and extreme dietary practices?

DR. SHEIKH: The focus should always be on a balanced, healthy lifestyle—adequate diet, regular exercise, and routine screening. While the microbiome is important, it's not a magic solution for cancer prevention. For those with cancer risk factors, such as a family history, the most important step is early detection through screening. For example, if someone has a family member diagnosed with colon cancer at 50, they should begin colonoscopy screenings at 40 to detect and remove polyps, which can prevent cancer. But it's crucial to remember that polyps take about 10 years to develop into cancer, so screenings should be scheduled at the right age, not too early. Right now, cancer prevention is more about these tried-and-tested methods, rather than jumping into extreme diets or trends that may not have proven benefits. ■

Truth Be (TB) Told

Tuberculosis (TB) is a health issue that doesn't always make the headlines, but it's one we can't afford to overlook. In Malaysia, TB continues to pose challenges, with reported cases steadily increasing. While better detection means more people can receive early treatment, the fight against TB is far from over.

To shed light on the topic of TB and the progress being made, we had an insightful conversation with Dr. Jamalul Azizi Abdul Rahaman, a Consultant in Respiratory Medicine and Physician. Dr. Jamalul is a respected leader in the field, with special expertise in interventional bronchoscopy and pulmonary physiology. From his training in Marseille, France, to pioneering key practices like rigid bronchoscopy in Malaysia, Dr. Jamalul's career is nothing short of inspiring. In this conversation, we discussed the current efforts to combat TB and what we can learn from one of Malaysia's top pulmonologists.

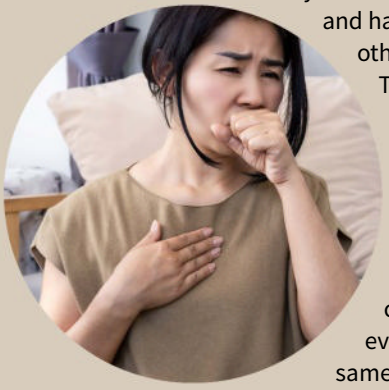
1Twenty80:

How big of a challenge is TB in Malaysia today, and what makes it such a persistent health issue?

DR JAMALUL: Throughout my 35 years in practice, the disease remains persistent for several reasons:

Late Presentation

A major factor is late presentation. Many patients delay seeking medical help, even after months of persistent coughing. By the time they come forward, the disease is often advanced and has spread beyond the lungs to affect other organs like the brain, liver, or kidneys. This delay makes treatment more challenging, and in some cases, it's too late to save them.



I recall a case of a young boy from Kuala Lipis who waited three months for a CT scan at his local hospital. His condition worsened, and his family eventually brought him to me. On the same day, I diagnosed him with TB and started treatment, but the delay had already made his case more severe. This kind of scenario is common, especially among non-locals, such as migrant workers, who may hesitate to seek care due to fear of legal repercussions or cost barriers.

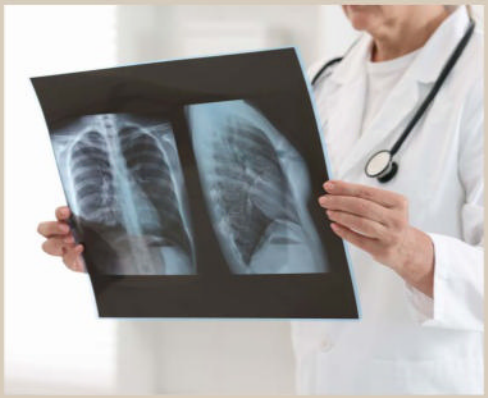
Patient and Comorbidity Factors

Certain groups, like those with chronic conditions—such as uncontrolled diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), or patients on immunosuppressive drugs—are particularly vulnerable to TB. These comorbidities complicate treatment outcomes and make it harder to achieve full recovery.

Gaps in the Healthcare System

There are also systemic issues, particularly in general practice (GP) settings. Some GPs lack access to chest X-ray facilities, which is crucial for diagnosing TB early. Patients often jump between GPs, receiving antibiotics for what is mistakenly thought to be a viral infection. By the time they're referred to specialists or government hospitals, their condition has often deteriorated.

For example, in TB mortality meetings during my time in government service, we found that gaps in history-taking and thorough assessments by some GPs were common reasons for missed or delayed diagnoses. This is not to say all GPs are at fault—many do excellent work—but the lack of diagnostic resources in some clinics poses a significant challenge.



Impact of Medical Tourism and Global Mobility

Another issue is the influx of patients through medical tourism. Some of these individuals unknowingly carry TB and travel without proper precautions, potentially spreading the disease. While medical tourism benefits the healthcare sector, it adds complexity to controlling infectious diseases like TB.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) aims to eliminate TB by 2030, but based on my experience, this target will be difficult to achieve without addressing these persistent issues—particularly late presentations, vulnerable groups with comorbidities, and gaps in healthcare resources. Addressing these challenges is critical if we want to see meaningful progress in combating TB in Malaysia.

1Twenty80:

How does the availability and quality of medical infrastructure impact the treatment outcomes for TB patients?

DR. JAMALUL: Of course, better health facilities play a role, but it's not just about having advanced infrastructure. Skilled doctors who are aware of TB and able to identify it when a patient presents with a prolonged cough are equally important. Patients themselves need to understand the importance of seeking care early. This isn't usually a problem in private hospitals, where patients come in promptly. In government settings, however, it's common for patients to delay seeking help—even if they've been coughing for two weeks.

One major reason for this is overcrowding. Government hospitals are extremely busy, with long waiting times to see specialists. Even something like scheduling a CT scan can take months, delaying everything in the process. On top of that, these hospitals are severely understaffed. When doctors are seeing 100 patients a day, it's impossible to provide the level of care patients need.

> "However, in terms of TB specifically, air pollution isn't a factor that increases vulnerability or worsens its severity."

In private hospitals, things are very different. I've been working in one for two months now, and everything moves so much faster. I can spend time explaining things to my patients and answering their questions. That's what's missing in government hospitals, where doctors often only have five to ten minutes per patient. The specialists in government hospitals are good, but they're stretched thin, which affects the overall quality of care.

The issue isn't just limited to staff shortages. Administrative challenges, such as slow internet and outdated systems, make it harder to retrieve test results and patient records quickly. This adds to the delays and frustration for both patients and healthcare workers.
Ultimately, it's not just about having the best facilities or equipment. If you don't have enough doctors, nurses, and paramedics to support the system, it won't work. That's the most important factor for ensuring good treatment outcomes.

1Twenty80:

How does living in urban areas with high air pollution affect the risk of contracting TB or worsening its severity?

DR. JAMALUL: Air pollution doesn't directly increase the risk of contracting TB. Instead, it is more closely associated with conditions like COPD. You become vulnerable to TB when you're exposed to someone with active TB who is coughing near you, which leads to infection—not because of air pollution.

That said, air pollution—both outdoor and indoor—can still have harmful effects on respiratory health, which makes it challenging to avoid altogether. Taking precautions, like wearing masks, is essential to mitigate exposure. However, in terms of TB specifically, air pollution isn't a factor that increases vulnerability or worsens its severity.

1Twenty80:

What are your thoughts on drug-resistant TB, and what challenges remain in managing this form of the disease?

DR. JAMALUL: Drug-resistant TB is an extremely challenging condition to treat. The good news is that in Malaysia, drug-resistant TB is still under control and not as widespread as in certain countries like those in Eastern Europe, where the incidence is high. Globally, 88% of estimated multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) cases occur in middle or high-income countries, with 60% found in Brazil, China, India, Russia, and South Africa. Malaysia, however, is not in that category, which is reassuring.

The main challenge with drug-resistant TB is that it requires complex treatment protocols, which are not only expensive but can also come with no guarantee of a cure. One significant reason drug-resistant TB develops is when TB is mismanaged by healthcare providers. Proper TB treatment typically requires a combination of three or four drugs over a six-month period. Resistance can develop if doctors prescribe inadequate dosages or limit the treatment to only one or two drugs. This mismanagement can lead to drug resistance and make the condition more difficult to treat.

Fortunately, doctors in Malaysia are generally good at managing TB, which has helped prevent drug resistance from becoming a major issue. "The best treatment for drug-resistant TB is to prevent it from happening," which is why prevention remains the most effective strategy.

That said, if drug-resistant TB were to become a widespread problem, it would be a severe crisis. Managing such cases would be challenging, costly, and could lead to devastating outcomes. It's an issue that needs to be taken seriously, as the consequences of a significant rise in drug-resistant TB would be catastrophic, something that I admit is difficult even to contemplate.

1Twenty80:

How effective are the current diagnostic methods for TB in Malaysia, and do they meet the needs of the population in terms of speed and accuracy?

DR. JAMALUL: Diagnostic methods for TB in Malaysia are highly effective, whether in the public or private sector. Overall, the country's TB diagnostics are superb. In private hospitals, the speed and efficiency of diagnostics are excellent, with results typically returned very quickly. Unfortunately, this level of service is difficult to match in government hospitals due to the sheer volume of patients they handle. Despite TB remaining a priority in the public healthcare system and efforts to expedite diagnosis, delays are inevitable because of the patient load. It is nearly impossible to diagnose a patient with suspected TB on the same day in a government hospital. This discrepancy highlights a significant difference in the speed of service between the public and private sectors, though both are committed to providing accurate and timely diagnoses.

1Twenty80:

What are some conditions that can mimic TB by presenting similar symptoms?

DR. JAMALUL: There are a few conditions that can mimic TB due to their similar symptoms, such as:

Persistent cough

Coughing up blood

Weight loss

Night sweats

The most significant condition that can present with symptoms similar to TB is lung cancer. It can be challenging to differentiate between the two on an X-ray, as they may appear similar. In some unfortunate cases, a patient may have both TB and lung cancer simultaneously. This can happen because TB is highly endemic in Malaysia, making co-occurrence possible.

The situation contrasts sharply with countries like Australia, where I spent a year working in a hospital. During that year, I only encountered one case of TB. The same can be said for countries in Europe, including the UK and the US, where TB is not as common. However, in Malaysia, TB cases are seen nearly every week, especially in government services, making it a prevalent health issue.

Diagnosing whether a patient has TB or lung cancer can be challenging due to their overlapping symptoms. To confirm a diagnosis, we often need to conduct further investigations, such as bronchoscopy, scans, or biopsies. The process is simplified if the sputum test shows TB, as this result is definitive. However, chest X-rays may sometimes suggest TB, but the results can be negative, necessitating additional tests.

Detecting lung cancer early is crucial due to its significant impact on health. While these investigations are typically not difficult in Malaysia, the challenge lies in distinguishing between TB and lung cancer, as they can appear very similar. Fortunately, we have the facilities and services available to accurately diagnose the condition.

1Twenty80:

What are the preventive methods being taken to try and manage TB in Malaysia?

DR. JAMALUL: Managing and preventing TB, particularly in Malaysia, presents a significant challenge. In public spaces such as shopping malls, it is difficult to fully control exposure, and continuous mask-wearing is not practical for most people. As a result, the risk of exposure remains a concern.

Preventive Measures in Healthcare Settings

In a hospital setting, preventive measures are more comprehensive. When patients present with symptoms such as a persistent cough, precautions are taken immediately. Medical staff wear masks prior to examining these patients, and in cases where TB is suspected, they are isolated from others to prevent spread. Nurses, who are often the first point of contact for patients, are particularly vulnerable. Government data indicates that they have a higher incidence of contracting TB while on duty.

Hospitals use triage systems to identify and manage potential TB cases efficiently. For instance, in the emergency department, patients presenting with coughs are assessed and directed to separate areas for further evaluation. Isolation wards equipped with negative pressure are available to minimize the risk of transmission.

From a personal perspective, I ensure strict adherence to protective measures. When performing procedures on suspected TB patients, I wear a mask, and the assisting nurses use N95 masks for additional protection. If these precautions were not in place, it would be much easier for healthcare workers to contract TB. Despite these measures, cases can still occur if protective equipment is not used correctly. Early precaution, such as wearing a mask as soon as TB is suspected, is critical, as waiting for confirmation could lead to exposure.

Challenges Outside Healthcare Settings

Outside the hospital, prevention is more complex. Constant mask-wearing is not feasible, and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the practice has diminished. Public areas, such as shopping malls and busy city centres, pose challenges for individual protection. While some may choose to wear masks for added safety, it is not common practice, making it difficult to maintain comprehensive protection in everyday life.

1Twenty80:

Do you see significant differences in TB severity or treatment outcomes between those vaccinated with BCG and those who aren't?

DR. JAMALUL: That's an interesting question and one that comes up frequently. The simple answer is: no, the BCG vaccination does not provide lifelong protection against TB, which is why people can still develop TB as they grow older.

Purpose and Limitations of the BCG Vaccine

The BCG vaccine is primarily administered to protect children from severe forms of TB, such as TB of the brain. It does not offer immunity to adults. This is a critical point that many may not understand. Although the vaccine is effective at reducing the risk of serious TB in children, it does not prevent TB infection in adulthood.

Current Vaccine Development and Challenges

Unfortunately, we do not have a vaccine that provides comprehensive, long-term protection against TB for adults. Unlike the pneumococcal vaccine, which requires only one shot for long-term protection, or the influenza vaccine that is taken annually, TB remains a challenge. While a better BCG vaccine or an entirely new TB vaccine for adults would be beneficial, there has been no significant breakthrough yet. If a suitable vaccine existed, the WHO and governments worldwide would have already implemented it.

Conclusion and Hope for the Future

We are still waiting for advancements in TB vaccine research and development. While there is hope that scientists will one day create an effective vaccine for adults, there is still much work to be done in this field. Until then, the current BCG vaccine will continue to be used to protect children from severe TB cases. ■

CHOOSING THE RIGHT ADULT DIAPERS

Tips for comfort and confidence

By Yasanthi Devi

Choosing the right adult diaper can make a big difference in comfort and quality of life for those managing incontinence.

With so many options out there, it's important to find a diaper that works best for your specific needs. Here's a simple guide to help you make the best choice:

#1 Understand Absorbency Needs

Diapers vary in absorbency, so think about how much protection you need. If you have light incontinence, a pull-up style or a diaper with lighter absorbency might be enough. For more severe cases, look for products designed with high absorbency and features that lock in moisture to prevent leaks.

#2 Get the Right Fit

A good fit is crucial for both comfort and effectiveness. Adult diapers come in sizes from small to extra-large. Check the sizing chart from the manufacturer and measure your waist or hips to ensure you're choosing the right size. A diaper that fits well will be more comfortable and less likely to leak.

#3 Think About Discretion

For those who value discretion, opt for diapers that are thin yet absorbent. Some have a cloth-like outer cover that makes them less noticeable under clothing.

#4 Look for Comfort Features

Soft and breathable materials can make a big difference. Choose diapers with a gentle inner lining, flexible leg cuffs, and a breathable back sheet to keep your skin comfortable and reduce irritation. Some also have a wetness indicator, which changes colour when it's time for a change.

#5 Pick the Right Style

There are different styles of adult diapers, including pull-ups, briefs with tabs, and fitted briefs. Pull-ups are like regular underwear and are good for those who can change themselves. Briefs with tabs are adjustable and offer more security, making them ideal if someone else helps with changes. Fitted briefs provide extra protection and are great for long wear.

Sources: Healthline, WebMD

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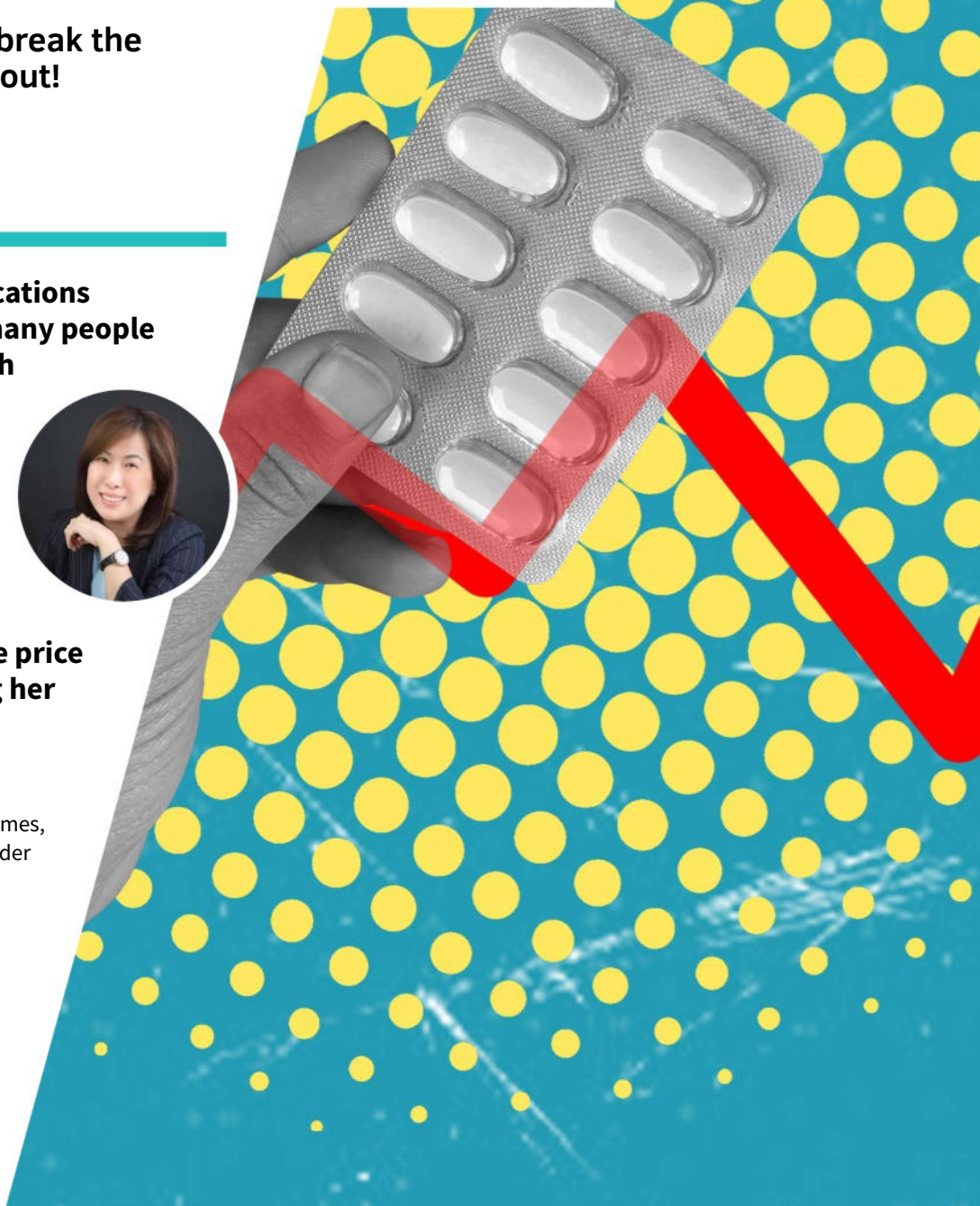
THE RISING COST IN DRUGS

Your health shouldn't break the bank, right? Let's find out!

By Nur Adilah



As the cost of medications continues to rise, many people are feeling the pinch at the pharmacy counter. Gina Koay, a community pharmacist at City Wellness Pharmacy in Penang, has seen firsthand how these price hikes are impacting her patients.

From families struggling to manage prescriptions to seniors on fixed incomes, the financial burden is becoming harder to ignore. In this article, Gina shares her insights into the challenges local pharmacies face and offers practical advice for navigating the ever-increasing costs of healthcare.

1Twenty80:

HAS THE INCREASE IN MEDICATION COSTS BECOME A RECURRING ISSUE?

GINA KOAY: The price increases aren't just happening now—they've been happening every year. Some imported medications go up by 5% to 10% annually. While generic drugs may not see price hikes every year, they do tend to increase every few years. So, it's something we've come to expect, especially with inflation rates rising each year.

1Twenty80:

WHAT ARE THE KEY REASONS BEHIND THE ONGOING INCREASE IN DRUG PRICES?

GINA: Starting from 2025, there will be a minimum monthly '*gaji*' (wage) of RM 1700, but that's just one factor in the bigger picture. Taxes and other variables come into play as well. So, for me, it's becoming a norm. People often think we're selling expensive medications, but that's not the case. The cost isn't driven by us; we can't just keep squeezing the margins. Instead, we need to look for alternative solutions.

1Twenty80:

HAVE YOU SEEN ANY SIGNS OF PATIENTS AVOIDING OR DELAYING THEIR MEDICATIONS DUE TO FINANCIAL CHALLENGES?

GINA: Yes, it's definitely something I see regularly. There are two main areas where people seek health care: one is government hospitals, where patients follow up with their treatments at clinics or public hospitals; the other is private hospitals, where they may go to a private pharmacy or a GP. For those in the government system, medications

> **"The price increases aren't just happening now—they've been happening every year."**

are typically provided for free or at a very low cost—around RM1. So, they usually don't face major issues with affordability. The problem, though, is compliance. With the overflow of medications, patients often don't know how to take them properly, or they may even choose not to take them at all.

On the other hand, those who visit private hospitals often face a financial burden, as they have to pay for their medications out of their own pockets. Some will delay getting the medicine because they can't afford it that month. I have one customer who told me, "I'll work harder and then I'll buy the medication I need. Until then, I'll just use the medicine from the government hospital." They delay it but try to adjust. I always suggest that they come in for follow-ups, especially for chronic conditions like high blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol—things we can manage in the community pharmacy. For conditions we can't handle, patients sometimes delay treatment due to cost, or they seek assistance from charitable organizations. Others may rely on government hospitals and their limited resources, which also means depending on the quota system.

1Twenty80:

HOW DO YOU THINK THE INCREASING COST OF MEDICATIONS IMPACTS PATIENTS' ABILITY TO ACCESS AFFORDABLE TREATMENT?

GINA: Yeah, health is definitely affected. Imagine everyone starts flocking to government hospitals for treatment. The government has limited funds, and there are just too many people in need of care. Then there's the tier system where the government targets different income groups—B40, M20, T20. Ideally, they focus on funding B40, but the reality is that people from all income groups still head to government hospitals because the medications are free. And honestly, who wouldn't want free medication? The problem is that this creates an imbalance. Those who can afford private care are crowding out those who truly need the help, so those in the most need sometimes can't get the treatment they deserve.

It's really unfortunate, especially considering the way our healthcare system works. Anyone who can stand in line and wait, gets access to treatment, regardless of whether they truly need it or not. But don't forget, even the standard medications at government hospitals are seeing price hikes. This means the government faces higher costs, which forces them to tighten their budget. As a result, they might buy fewer supplies, and the quota for those who need it most gets smaller. Meanwhile, in private healthcare, you get seen without having to wait, but you're paying a premium for that convenience.

1Twenty80:

HOW OFTEN DO PATIENTS ASK FOR LOWER-COST ALTERNATIVES OR NON-BRANDED MEDICINES FOR THEIR MEDICATIONS?

GINA: As pharmacists, we're always aware of generic medications and the options available. If there's a generic alternative, I always make sure to let my patients know. For example, some patients come in asking for the brand-name medication. But I don't carry that medication in my pharmacy, only the generic version. So I'll tell them, "I have a locally made generic that's bioequivalent—it works exactly the same". I make it clear that I'm not changing the medication, just offering a more affordable option. I'll also let them know that the generic costs, say, RM6, while the brand-name version might be higher. Some patients are open to it and say, 'Okay, I don't mind trying it.' Others, however, are less convinced. About 20% of customers will say, 'I don't like generics, I don't think they work for me,' and they'll walk out to find a pharmacy that carries the brand name.

1Twenty80:

IN OTHER WORDS, THERE IS STILL A PREFERENCE FOR BRANDED ONES?

GINA: Yeah, some prefer the branded ones. Maybe they feel that it works for them. Some people say, "I want a good one; I don't mind paying." Yeah, you have people like that. Or some have already tried the so-called generics and experienced side effects. Then they will just condemn the generics, saying, "It doesn't work. I don't want it."

1Twenty80:

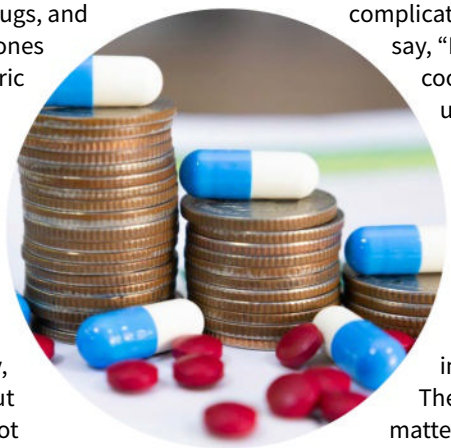
DO REVIEWS INFLUENCE A PATIENT'S DECISION?

GINA: Maybe. Some go online and check them. Some experience it themselves. Others form opinions based on their family or friends. It's still influenced by what people say. It may not just be the reviews you see online; some rely on word of mouth from their families.

1Twenty80:

IN WHAT WAYS DO THE RISING COSTS OF MEDICATIONS INFLUENCE THE LONG-TERM HEALTH IMPACTS OF YOUR PATIENTS?

GINA: When it comes to the rising cost of medication, for example, diabetes drugs, there are generics and patented drugs, and some patented ones don't have generic alternatives. There is one, it's quite popular nowadays and costs over RM 100. Those who can afford it will say, "Okay, I'll just get it." But those who cannot afford it this month might say, "I can't afford it. I won't buy it, but I'll just go back to the government hospital."



To me, I don't know how they're going to manage it properly. Even though we try to explain to them, "If you're going to follow up with the government hospital, then do it regularly. If you want to follow up privately, then stick to that." But sometimes, they have this misconception that expensive medicine works better, even if they can't afford it. So, at the end of the day, it still comes back to the pharmacist's role in handling adherence and compliance. We need to explain how to take the medication properly. That's where medication reviews come in.

Unfortunately, some people don't care, and that's how they mismanage their health. They feel they can wait and see. They don't realise the importance of preventing complications early to avoid suffering in the future. Some people want a faster recovery but don't consider the risks until it's too late.

Take, for example, obese individuals with very high diabetes levels—those with high HBA1c readings. Even when you tell them they're at risk of stroke and other complications, they still say, "I'm okay. I'm cool. I don't care," until something happens.

Imagine someone unlucky enough to have a stroke immediately. The type of stroke matters too—some die instantly, while others survive but suffer. They could end up unconscious, in a vegetative state, or half-paralyzed. They might need extensive rehab and a lot of medication.

If they had focused on preventive care earlier, they wouldn't have to deal with these severe outcomes of diabetes. That's my take. Our role as pharmacists is to advise them to prioritise compliance and adherence to their medication regimen before their condition worsens. You don't want to face the complications or side effects of poorly managed diabetes.

> **Our role as pharmacists is to advise them to prioritise compliance and adherence to their medication regimen before their condition worsens."**

1Twenty80:

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON DIFFICULTIES PATIENTS ENCOUNTER WHEN ATTEMPTING TO MANAGE THE HIGH COSTS OF PRESCRIPTIONS?

GINA: Yeah, they feel lost. They just don't care sometimes. Let me give you an example using diabetes because I've encountered cases like this. For instance, when diabetes levels get too high, it can cause changes in facial structure. Although the patient might not have had a stroke, there's a condition called Bell's palsy.

One of my patients, an e-hailing driver, was working extremely hard—from 7:00 AM to 11:00 PM—without proper rest or meals. He wasn't eating or taking his medications properly. He just kept driving to earn money. He thought, "I don't have money to buy medicine, so I'll put it on hold until I can afford it."

He struggled, and then one day, he developed Bell's palsy. He became worried, thinking it was a stroke. He ended up spending even more money on treatments like physiotherapy, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), acupuncture, and more to rehabilitate his facial muscles. Then he came to me asking what supplements he could take, so I suggested B complexes.

He also mentioned that he didn't want to monitor his diabetes closely because he couldn't afford to test every day—the tests are expensive too. These are the common difficulties patients face: they delay treatment because of costs, which often leads to more expensive complications down the line.

1Twenty80:

ARE THERE SPECIFIC GROUPS (SUCH AS THE ELDERLY OR UNINSURED) THAT ARE PRONE TO THE IMPACT OF INCREASING DRUG PRICES?

GINA: Yes, I feel that many of the customers I serve are people who don't have company support or insurance coverage. When they need it most, they have to pay out of pocket. For example, if they need a stent or bypass surgery, they often realize too late that they don't have insurance to cover it. They can't afford the surgery, so they either wait for the government to provide it for free or at minimal cost, or they simply have to wait a long time.

In the meantime, they take certain medications just to delay the issue. But to me, this is like a time bomb. For instance, if a patient has an 80% blockage in their heart, the doctor might say they can still wait. But in reality, some patients can't wait and end up dying—maybe from a heart attack—before the treatment can happen.

I know of one case where the government hospital gave a patient a date for a stent procedure, scheduled for June of the following year. Unfortunately, the person died before that date because they couldn't wait. They had no money to go for private treatment, which led to a massive heart attack.

The same situation applies to medication prices. If they're on medication to thin their blood or manage their condition, they might go to a private hospital, but the costs are high. On the other hand, the government sector provides medications for free or at minimal cost.

For those who can't afford to wait in line at a government hospital or don't access government services, they end up facing the high costs of private medication. They often say, "I don't have money to buy it," and end up not buying the medicine at all. This leaves them in a situation where they're essentially waiting for their condition to worsen.

1Twenty80:

WHAT CHANGES OR APPROACHES DO YOU BELIEVE COULD HELP MAKE MEDICATIONS MORE AFFORDABLE FOR PATIENTS?

GINA: If the government could reduce taxes? Especially on imported medications, that would help. Although, nowadays, there are many generics available, and they're often more affordable. But, of course, the quality and safety of these generics must still be guaranteed. That's why we really need to focus on preventive care, especially here in Malaysia. Right now, our healthcare system is very reactive. It's like, if you don't have a heart attack, you don't go to the hospital. If you don't see ants in your toilet bowl, you don't think diabetes is serious enough to get checked.

But if we could encourage more regular screenings—like wellness checks on a monthly or yearly basis—it could make a huge difference. People should be aware that as they age, regular check-ups are important. They need to understand that prevention is key, and being proactive about your health can save you from serious issues down the line

1Twenty80:

SO, MORE AWARENESS AND SCREENING TESTS SHOULD BE DONE FOR EARLY PREVENTION?

GINA: Yes, definitely. More awareness about screenings is important, and people need to be informed about the signs and symptoms of chronic diseases we've discussed. These are the areas where we can focus on prevention. For rare diseases like leukemia, for instance, people can die young from it. If the government could make medications for such conditions more accessible and affordable, more people could be saved. If not, we really have to rely on the research and development efforts of our scientists. Most of the important medications for rare diseases come from overseas, and we can't do much to prevent that. There's not much choice in those cases.

But for conditions we can prevent, we do have a choice. We can focus on preventive care. Monitoring and modifying our lifestyle can make a big difference—things like more exercise, less oily food, and more fruits and vegetables. If you do this part well, you can avoid issues like heart attacks, strokes, or obesity, which in turn saves a lot of money. If you're thinking about supplements, sure, you can consider them, but you need to make sure you're getting the right ones for your specific needs.

The challenge is that many people are easily swayed by the overwhelming amount of information, especially when it comes to medical matters online. Social media is flooded with health advice, and people often buy whatever is marketed as "good" without considering if it's safe, of high quality, or even approved by the Ministry of Health. They just want a quick fix. Unfortunately, they don't always realise that some of these things could be harmful in the long run.

That's why I hope pharmacists can play a bigger role in improving health literacy. By guiding people toward the right supplements, medications, and lifestyle changes, we can help them become more aware of their health conditions. This can help prevent future problems and ultimately reduce health statistics in a positive way.

> **For me, I want to focus on doing medication reviews with people who are interested, advocating for preventive care, and helping people become more aware of their health."**

I know the government is focusing more on prevention and wellness, which is great because that's what developed countries are doing. But we also need to emphasise the importance of lifestyle changes so people can live longer, healthier lives. Starting now is key—2025 just arrived, and it's a good time for New Year's resolutions. We really need to make it a point to take action now, not wait until it's too late or say '*nanti nanti*' (hold on). If you keep putting it off, you might end up suffering from heart disease, stroke, or obesity later on.

For me, I want to focus on doing medication reviews with people who are interested, advocating for preventive care, and helping people become more aware of their health. This way, they can make positive changes before they face serious health issues. ■

The Scentimental Value

How a single scent can stir emotions, bring back memories, and even cheer you up

By Siti Salihah

Have you ever started spring-cleaning your room, only to stumble upon an old box? Inside, there's an emptied perfume bottle. You catch a faint whiff of it, and suddenly—you're transported to a vivid memory from years ago. The people you were with, the place you were at, even the emotions you felt all come rushing back. It's borderline overwhelming, and there you are, sitting in the middle of your room, almost tearing up from 'unboxing' that long-forgotten moment.

In this article, we'll explore why scents pull at our hearts and minds.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND SMELL AND EMOTION

Brain Connections

Smelling is deeply tied to your brain's emotional and memory centers. When you breathe in a fragrance, it heads straight to the amygdala and hippocampus—areas responsible for emotions and recalling memories. This is why even a fleeting scent can transport you back in time.

Memories

Unlike other senses, smell bypasses the "thinking" parts of the brain and connects directly to the areas responsible for emotional memories, making those moments feel incredibly vivid and personal.

Mood Shifter

Scents can instantly change how you feel—for example, a whiff of lavender can help you unwind after a long day, while zesty citrus aromas like orange or lemon can give you a burst of energy. It's why aromatherapy uses specific fragrances to create desired emotional effects.

Physical Responses

Scents definitely go beyond emotions. Stress-relieving scents like rose or green tea have been shown to lower heart rates and cortisol levels. While aromas like peppermint or rosemary are believed to sharpen focus and improve alertness during mentally demanding tasks.

Personal and Cultural Layers

For one person, the scent of coffee might evoke a sense of comfort and productivity, while for another, it might bring memories of lazy Sunday mornings. Similarly, certain fragrances—like incense or spices—carry deep cultural meanings that influence how we respond to them.

Learning and Adaptation

Your brain associates scents with experiences. The smell of sunscreen might take you back to a childhood beach holiday, while the aroma of a specific perfume can remind you of someone special. These connections strengthen with repetition, creating lasting emotional bonds.

Context

Where you experience a smell and your emotional state at that moment matter too. A hearty aroma of food can seem mouth watering when you're hungry but might feel overwhelming after a big meal. Similarly, scents in comforting spaces like your home, often feel more pleasant than those encountered in unfamiliar environments.

Sources: Building and Environment, Chemical Senses, Body Sensation and Sensibility, Frontiers in System Neuroscience, Emotion, Space and Society, Science of Olfaction

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CONTEMPORARY FASHION

Stay Classy, Stylish, and Modest—Here's How to Slay Your Outfits!

By Nur Adilah

Fashion trends change in the blink of an eye! One minute, there's a new wardrobe essential; the next, people are turning everyday outfits into runway-ready looks. Keeping up with these trends can be overwhelming, especially if you feel stuck in the same old styles. But don't worry—being comfortable in your clothes is what matters most!

If you're nodding along and thinking about all those "meh" clothes buried in your wardrobe, now's the perfect time to give them a second chance. Let's mix, match, and make your modest fashion game pop! If you're sure you won't wear something again, why not donate it to someone who will?

Ready to revamp your style? Let's dive into these fun and fashionable modest looks:

#1

Old-Money Style

Feel like your're stepping into an episode of Downton Abbey? The old-money style screams elegance and timeless class. It's all about subtle, high-quality clothing with modest designs—nothing flashy. Picture trench coats, turtlenecks, trousers, and button-ups in shades of blue, silver, brown, and white.

Pro tip: Pair a knitted short jacket with pleated straight pants for that "quiet luxury" vibe. This style says, "I'm effortlessly classy, and yes, my outfit whispers 'wealth.'

#2

Minimalist Look

The minimalist look is all about simplicity. Think "back to basics" with timeless pieces that fit any occasion, any time of the year. Bonus: It's trend-proof!

Stick to a palette of whites, nudes, blacks, or other versatile colors. For a casual vibe, grab a crisp white tee, blue wide-leg jeans, and white sneakers. You'll look effortlessly chic without breaking a sweat.

#3

Bohemian Style

Love flowy fabrics and intricate designs? The bohemian style is your new best friend! With its maxi dresses, tribal patterns, and floral prints, it's perfect for those who want to look fashionable and stay comfy.

Boho chic comes in earthy tones like maroon, mustard yellow, and deep green, but there are also nude shades for a more natural look. These outfits scream "wanderlust" and are perfect for traveling. Stay stylish and modest while exploring the world!

#4

Urban Modest

Think modern, trendy, and ultra-chic! Urban modest fashion is all about oversized blouses, wide-leg trousers, and abstract patterns. It's loose, comfortable, and effortlessly fashionable.

Pair a baggy blouse with wide-leg trousers and black heels, then accessorize with simple, understated pieces. This look is perfect for a casual lunch or a teatime outing. You'll look contemporary and cool while staying modest.

#5

Romantic Modest

Looking for the perfect date-night outfit? Romantic modest fashion blends vintage romance with elegance.

For a touch of luxury, try a red slip skirt with a matching turtleneck and a white blazer. Prefer dresses? Go for an ankle-length piece with lace or embroidery for a dreamy, ladylike vibe. These outfits prove you can feel like a princess without showing off curves—ideal for a classy, romantic evening.

Fashionable and Modest—Yes, It's Possible!

For Muslim women and anyone aiming to dress modestly, it can be tricky to follow mainstream fashion trends. Plus, many trendy outfits come with hefty price tags. The good news? You don't need a huge budget to be stylish!

Get creative: layer your clothing, choose the right materials, and skip the over-the-top accessories. Modest fashion isn't about hiding—it's about expressing yourself with elegance and confidence.

Sheer fabrics can help you create stylish and modest outfits. You can layer a sheer blouse over a fitted turtleneck or wear a flowy sheer dress over wide-leg pants.

These ideas add texture to your outfit without revealing too much. You can also mix and match different colors and patterns underneath to keep your look interesting.

So, grab those pieces from your wardrobe, experiment with styles, and rock your modest looks like a fashion pro!

Sources: Bokitta, Sweet Salt Clothing, Mehar, The Aesthetic Rectangle, Radiantly Dressed

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Mr. String-Your-Heart

From a 'fussy' succulent to unexpected joy, discover how plant parenting might be the best thing you do

By Siti Salihah

If I were to be asked to pick one plant to be a companion for life, I'd probably end up as the main character in a doomed love story—that poor plant would meet its untimely demise within days. That's how un-green my thumbs are, unfortunately.

Meanwhile, my family out there routinely travels almost 200 miles just to visit a nursery. And then there's my life-long BFF, Shahidatul Atikah, who, to her own surprise, discovered a love for plants through her first job as a plant caretaker. At first, she naively thought, "They're only plants," so she wasn't expecting to get attached at all. But a few months into the job, caring for plants and watching them grow had turned into a passion that deeply affected her—in the best way possible.

So what's the secret here? Why do plants tug at our hearts and spark so much joy? Here's why:

PLANTS MAKE THE ROOM FEEL ALIVE

Humans are naturally drawn to living things; it's a primal connection that makes us feel calmer and more grounded. Ever notice how people in cities, surrounded by concrete and noise, are the ones falling in love with plant parenting? This romantic idea of nurturing something green and alive is all over social media. Maybe it's because, in the chaos of urban life, having a plant on your desk or by your bedside becomes more than just decoration—it's like having a quiet companion, alive and waiting for you. Science backs this up too: plants have a way of healing us, sharpening our focus and even helping our minds feel a little more alive.

PLANTS LIFT YOUR MOOD

A study revealed that hospitalised patients surrounded by greenery experienced lower stress levels, as if the plants had offered a quiet sense of relief to their minds and bodies. It goes beyond individual moments too—people living in neighbourhoods with abundant green spaces tend to experience less mental distress. Take it from Shahidatul, who describes plant parenting as a hobby that's both rewarding and grounding. "It's like taking care of a cat," she said, "but the joy comes from watching them grow and thrive, which really does something for your mental well-being."

PLANTS ARE NATURE'S AIR PURIFIER

Forget buying those overpriced, overmarketed air purifiers. Nature, it seems, has already provided us with the perfect solutions—plants. The Snake Plant, for example, is not just a pretty face in the corner; it quietly works to reduce pollutants like formaldehyde, toluene, and CO2, making the air around us cleaner and fresher. And then there's Aloe Vera, a night-time guardian, silently emitting oxygen while we sleep and ensuring we wake up to better air. There's something beautifully simple about this: no plastic components, no need for regular servicing. Just plants—self-sustaining, humble, and effective.

PLANTS HELP YOUR CREATIVE JUICES FLOW

This is the non-fictional reason why the 'main character is confused—disturbed—lost—and doesn't know who they are anymore—so they embark on an adventure to find themselves again' trope is one of the most iconic in films and books. So it's no surprise that having plants around can help boost creativity. It's the act of having a plant nearby—growing, providing, yielding—that inspires creative thinking. Companies have caught on, with 'walking meetings' in green spaces becoming a popular way to spark fresh ideas.

PLANTS BOOST SELF-ESTEEM

There's something about taking care of plants that feels good for the soul. Shahidatul definitely understands this on a deeper level. She shared how her String of Hearts plant—one of the "fussiest", according to her, to care for—actually thrived under her attention. "I really felt good seeing it grow," she said. And it's not about pride; studies show that green exercise—whether it's spending time in nature or caring for plants—lifts our mood and boosts self-esteem, even with just short bursts of time. The act of tending to something living has a way of grounding us, reminding us that we can take care of ourselves just like we take care of our plants.

PLANTS BOOST PRODUCTIVITY

You wouldn't think productivity and greenery have much in common, but the connection is surprisingly real. Offices in Great Britain and the Netherlands—known for their iconic tulip fields—saw a noticeable lift in productivity when plants were added to workspaces. In fact, nearly every corporate survey reported employees wanted more plants around, saying it makes their sterile offices feel a little more like home, a little more alive and motivating. Maybe it's not just about productivity; maybe it's about finding little pockets of calm in places we least expect them. Isn't that what we're all looking for anyway? ■

Sources: Journal of Psychology and Behavior Studies, Journal of Environmental Horticulture, International Journal of Built Environment and Sustainability, Journal of Xidian University

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The Amazing Benefits of MACADAMIA NUTS

Learn more about this heart-healthy nut

By Nur Adilah

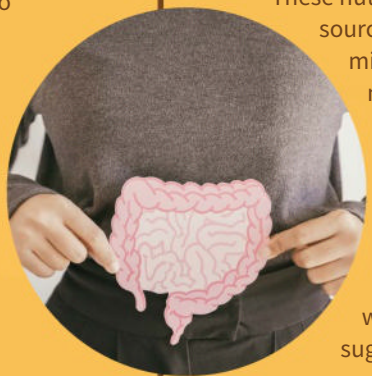
If you're looking for a snack that's both delicious and healthy, macadamia nuts are a great choice. These buttery, creamy nuts, originally from Australia, are now grown in places like Hawaii, Brazil, and New Zealand. And while they're rich in fat, it's the heart-healthy monounsaturated fats that make them a standout, supporting everything from blood sugar regulation to better skin. Let's dive into the top reasons why you should add macadamia nuts to your diet:

1. SUPPORTS WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

Macadamia nuts are packed with fiber and protein, making them a perfect snack for anyone looking to manage their weight. They help you feel fuller longer, so you're less likely to overeat.

2. AIDS DIGESTION

Thanks to their soluble fiber, macadamia nuts act as a prebiotic, supporting the growth of healthy gut bacteria. This can improve digestion and help keep things running smoothly.



3. BOOSTS SKIN HEALTH

Macadamias are loaded with tocotrienols—a powerful form of Vitamin E that helps protect skin from aging and sun damage. They can help your skin heal, hydrate, and even reduce wrinkles caused by sun exposure.

4. RICH IN NUTRIENTS

These nuts are a good source of vitamins, minerals, and monounsaturated fats, while being naturally low in sugar and carbs. They're a great way to get essential nutrients without adding extra sugar to your diet.

5. HELPS REGULATE BLOOD SUGAR

Macadamia nuts can help control blood sugar levels, making them beneficial for people with type 2 diabetes or those at risk. Their nutrient profile supports blood sugar regulation and may help reduce metabolic syndrome.

6. PACKED WITH ANTIOXIDANTS

Rich in tocotrienols, macadamias provide antioxidants that help lower cholesterol and may protect against brain disorders and certain types of cancer.

Incorporate these tasty nuts into your snacks or meals and enjoy their many health benefits—all while satisfying your taste buds!

Sources: Healthline, WebMd

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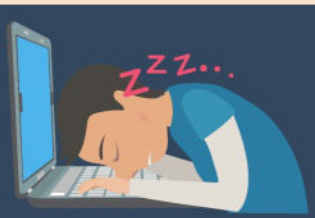
HOW WELL DO YOU SLEEP?

Good quality sleep is more than just closing your eyes

By Nur Adilah

Do you have a hard time sleeping? Or do you wake up still feeling tired? If so, you may be experiencing sleep deprivation, which can be concerning if it lasts for months. Many people tend to ignore these signs because they are unaware of what they face. It's important to have good quality sleep.

Here are some signs to monitor your sleeping patterns:



#1 Lack of Focus

You may find it difficult to concentrate, and your mind often wanders. This can affect your performance at work and leave you feeling behind. Over time, this can lead to decreased motivation and a negative mood.

#2 Irritability

Upon waking, you may feel an uneasy sensation that leaves you moody. You might feel quickly agitated or stressed but find relief as you gradually settle down.

#3 Headaches

If you frequently wake up with headaches, it could indicate poor sleep. If this occurs regularly, it's essential to consult a doctor.

#4 Difficulty Falling Asleep

You might struggle to fall asleep quickly and could take more than 30 minutes to do so. You may also find yourself waking up in the middle of the night and lying awake for an extended period.

#5 Breakouts

Your skin may become oily or dry, leading to acne and a dull complexion. You might also notice puffiness and dark circles around your eyes due to lack of sleep.

Have you heard of microsleep?

This occurs when you experience short episodes of sleep lasting less than 30 seconds due to extreme fatigue. It's a serious sign, particularly if it happens while you're engaged in important tasks. Be aware of excessive yawning or your head drooping forward.

Sleep deprivation impacts not only your energy levels but also your overall health. It can lead to serious conditions such as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, depression, and anxiety. It's natural to experience sleep deprivation due to work demands, high-stress levels, or underlying medical issues like insomnia, traumatic brain injury, and Parkinson's disease.

If sleep deprivation occurs frequently, it's crucial to seek treatment. Here are some approaches you can try to improve your sleep schedule:

- Limit Screen Time: Avoid using your phone at least 30 minutes before bedtime. Reducing screen time can help you feel more refreshed upon waking.
- Engage in Calming Activities: Consider writing in a journal to express your thoughts and emotions. This might help you achieve better sleep.
- Take a Morning Walk: Getting sunlight and engaging in light physical activity in the morning can enhance the quality of your sleep.
- Establish a Consistent Routine: Creating a regular sleep schedule helps your brain adapt, promoting healthier sleep patterns.

By implementing these strategies, you can work towards improving your sleep quality and overall well-being.

Sources: Cleveland Clinic, Very Well Health, WebMd

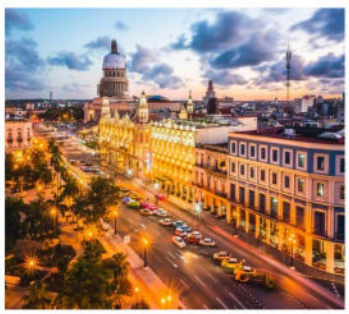
AROUND THE WORLD IN 5 BEATS

Travel destinations to experience the beat and live the music

By Siti Salihah

Are your feet itching to move to the beat, and your heart longing for an adventure that's anything but ordinary? Ditch the tranquil getaways and dive into destinations where the streets pulse with energy and the air hums with music. From vibrant parades to open-air festivals, these places are alive with rhythm, celebration, and joy. Every corner holds a melody waiting to be discovered, turning your vacation into a symphony of unforgettable experiences.

Whether you're swaying to soulful jazz, grooving to EDM beats, or clapping along to folk tunes, there's a destination that perfectly matches your vibe. Picture yourself dancing under starlit skies, marching in colorful parades, or simply soaking in the cultural essence of live music. These vibrant locations promise more than just a getaway—they're an invitation to let loose, celebrate life, and create memories that'll echo in your heart long after the music fades.



#1 HAVANA, CUBA

Image Credit: Robert Harding Video / Shutterstock.com

Havana—oh, na-na! The city pulses with the grooves of salsa, son cubano, and mambo, much like the catchy tune by Camila Cabello. From lively street performances to impromptu jam sessions in the city's vibrant neighborhoods, Havana's musical spirit is infectious. Cuban music, deeply influenced by African, Spanish, and Caribbean rhythms, makes this city a dream destination for music lovers. The annual Havana Jazz Festival and vibrant neighborhoods like Havana Vieja are hotspots where music travels through the air. For a taste of Havana's vibrant nightlife, head to Café Teatro Bertolt Brecht, one of the coolest spots in the city. Known for its electrifying atmosphere, it hosts live music every night, featuring iconic jazz fusion groups like Interactivo.

Image Credit: f11photo / Shutterstock.com

#2 New Orleans, Louisiana

New Orleans—where the music never stops and everyone has a dream, just like the trumpet-playing crocodile, Louis, in The Princess and the Frog, who longed to be a pro musician. The streets of this lively city are filled with the sounds of jazz, blues, and zydeco. From historic clubs like Preservation Hall to spontaneous performances on Frenchmen Street, New Orleans' musical energy is compelling, making it the perfect place to let your feet dance to the cadence of the city. Whether you're enjoying a lively second-line parade, listening to local street musicians, or catching a performance at the famous Tipitina's, the city's aura is unmistakable.

#3 Vienna, Austria

Vienna, the capital of classical music, is home to composers like Mozart, Beethoven, and Strauss. The city's grandeur is matched by its love for the arts, with venues like the Vienna State Opera and the Musikverein offering world-class performances. But Vienna isn't just about the classics—in places like Naschmarkt and Prater Park, you'll find street performers and live concerts, where modern pop and electronic beats blend seamlessly with classical influences. The city even hosts pop concerts at historic venues, such as when stars like Coldplay and Ariana Grande have brought their hits to the grand stage of the Wiener Stadthalle, proving that Vienna's music scene is ever-evolving, bridging the old and the new.

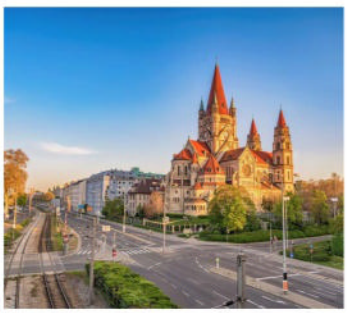


Image Credit: Noppasin Wongchum / Shutterstock.com

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#4 Kingston, Jamaica

Kingston is the heart of reggae music, where the legend Bob Marley was born and raised. The city's energy is filled with the sounds of reggae, ska, and dub music. Visit Trench Town, the birthplace of reggae, and see where Marley's musical journey began. Don't miss a trip to the Bob Marley Museum at his former home, where you can learn about his revolutionary impact on music and culture. Also, check out the vibrant East Kingston, known for its iconic Sound Systems and street parties. Kingston is not just a city—it's a musical pilgrimage for anyone who wants to feel the pulse of reggae's roots.

#5 Lisbon, Portugal

Lisbon is famous for Fado, a soulful genre of Portuguese music that expresses melancholy and longing. The city's historic neighborhoods, particularly Alfama and Bairro Alto, are filled with intimate Fado houses where singers perform to small, attentive crowds. But the music scene isn't all about Fado—it also embraces jazz, indie, and electronic music. The annual Super Bock Super Rock Festival and NOS Alive are two of the city's biggest music events, attracting top international and local acts. Whether you're soaking in the traditional sounds of Fado or enjoying a lively festival, Lisbon offers a diverse musical experience for every taste. ■

Image Credit: Pawel Kazmierczak / Shutterstock.com

Sources: Arts & Culture, Lisboa Secreta, Cuban Music School, Vienna.info

Nourishing &

Nourishing Recipes for Cancer Patients Undergoing Chemotherapy

By Edeline Anne Goh

Chemotherapy can take a toll on the body, often causing nausea, fatigue, and changes in appetite. During this challenging time, eating nutrient-dense meals that are easy to prepare and gentle on the stomach can make a significant difference. Whether it's to combat side effects, boost energy, or simply bring comfort, these recipes are here to support you on your journey. They're relatively simple to prepare and therefore they can easily prepped by yourself or by a caregiver.

• CREAMY AVOCADO AND SPINACH SMOOTHIE •

INGREDIENTS

1	Ripe avocado
1 cup	Fresh spinach
1	Banana (frozen if preferred)
1 cup	Unsweetened almond milk (or any preferred milk)
1 tbsp	Chia seeds
1 tsp	Honey or maple syrup (optional)

This nutrient-packed smoothie is both soothing and refreshing, perfect for days when eating solids feels like a challenge. It provides a balance of healthy fats, vitamins, and antioxidants to nourish the body.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Scoop out the avocado and place it in a blender along with the spinach, banana, and almond milk.
2. Blend until smooth. Add chia seeds and blend briefly to mix.
3. Sweeten with honey or maple syrup if desired. Serve immediately.

WHY IT HELPS: Avocado provides healthy fats and calories, spinach offers iron and vitamins, and chia seeds add fiber and omega-3s. This smoothie is also easy to digest and hydrating.

comforting meals

• QUINOA AND VEGGIE BOWL •

INGREDIENTS

½	Ripe avocado
1 cup	Cooked quinoa
1 cup	Steamed broccoli florets
½ cup	Diced sweet potato (roasted or steamed)
¼ cup	Cooked chickpeas
2 tbsps	Tahini
1 tbsp	Lemon juice
1 tsp	Olive oil

Pinch of turmeric and black pepper

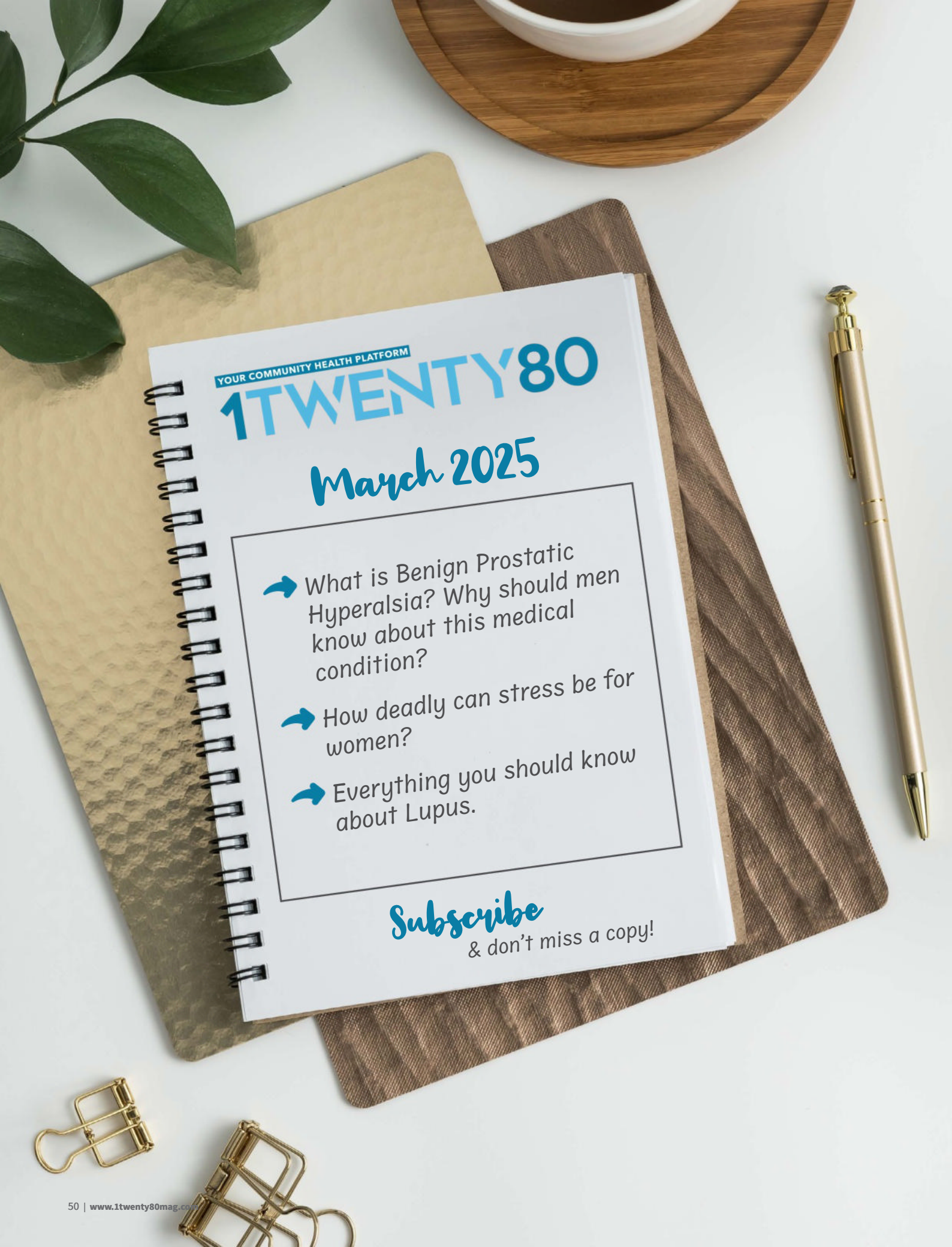
This light yet satisfying dish combines plant-based proteins, fiber, and anti-inflammatory ingredients to support recovery and energy levels.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In a bowl, combine quinoa, broccoli, sweet potato, and chickpeas.
2. In a separate bowl, mix tahini, lemon juice, olive oil, turmeric, and black pepper. Add water to thin the sauce if necessary.
3. Drizzle the tahini sauce over the quinoa and vegetables. Toss gently and serve warm or at room temperature.
4. You may enjoy the salad with rice or enjoy it by itself.

WHY IT HELPS: Quinoa is rich in protein and easy to prepare, while the veggies and spices provide essential nutrients and antioxidants to support immunity and reduce inflammation.

Proper nutrition is a vital part of cancer care, offering the body the tools it needs to heal and thrive. These recipes are designed to be comforting, nourishing, and simple to prepare, making mealtime a little easier and more enjoyable. Remember to consult with your healthcare team or dietitian for personalised dietary advice to meet your specific needs. ■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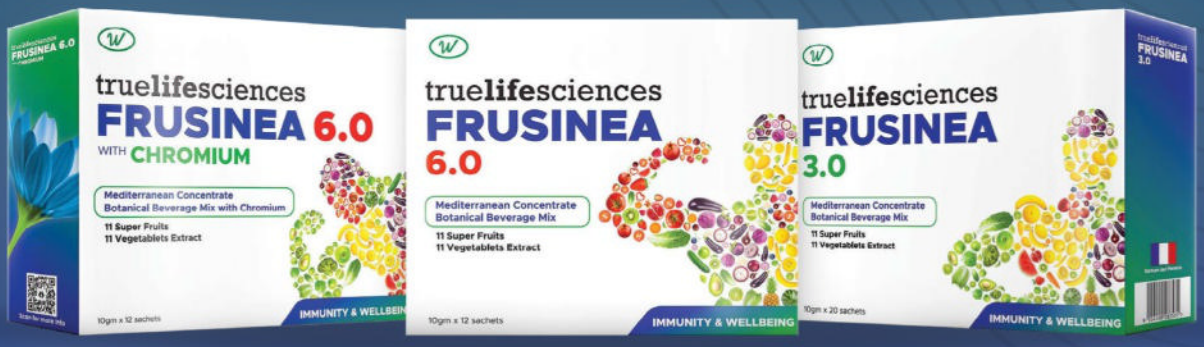

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3b	Moderately to severely decreased	30-44
4	Severely decreased	15-29
5	Kidney failure	<15

(Source: Kidney Disease Improving Global Outcome)

Consult your doctor today to know more!

*Chronic kidney disease taking a growing toll in Malaysia. www.thesundaily.my. (2022, March 10). Retrieved July 6, 2022, from https://www.thesundaily.my/local/chronic-kidney-disease-taking-a-growing-toll-in-malaysia-BK8936751
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*Saminathan, TA, Hooi, LS, Mohd Yusoff, M et al. 2020, 'Prevalence of chronic kidney disease and its associated factors in Malaysia; findings from a nationwide population-based cross-sectional study', BMC Nephrol 21, 344.

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